

## A legend retires

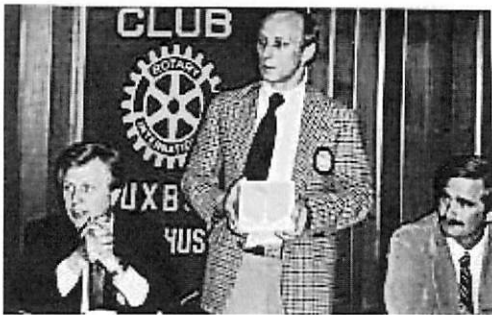
### Harbormaster Don Beers leaves after almost four decades

By Susanna Sheehan  
Clipper Editor

Winds of change have blown in to Duxbury harbor. Long-time Harbormaster Don Beers retired on Monday after 38 years on the job.

Beers, 62, announced his retirement in a letter on Friday, calling the decision to leave his long-time post “bitter sweet.”

“It has been a great pleasure and honor serving the Town of Duxbury as the Harbormaster,” Beers wrote. “Being the Harbormaster of Duxbury has been an adventure of a lifetime for me and my family. This is a bitter sweet decision that my family and I have made.



Rotary Club President Barry Williams (center), with Don Beers, Harbormaster (right) and Bob Hedd (left), honoring Duxbury teenagers who saved a girl from drowning, May 1983. (Fran Nichols)  
Photo courtesy “The Duxbury Book”

“I want to thank you very much for your support, guidance and friendship during my service to the Town of Duxbury,” he continued. “I am very proud and thankful of our collective achievements and accomplishments over many years. This is truly the best front yard a town could have.”

Beers has guided Duxbury harbor through two major dredging projects and at least five major hurricanes and countless tropical storms. He started on the job as an assistant seasonal harbormaster in 1978 under Harbormaster Manny Oliver when he was attending Northeastern University in Boston with the hopes of landing a job as a game warden at the Federal Fish and Wildlife Agency. Instead his life took a different turn when he was appointed as full-time harbormaster two years later.

As harbormaster, Beers oversaw three units: marine, beach and natural resources. The marine unit’s jobs include search and rescue, emergency medical services and law enforcement. The natural resources unit provides environmental protection, law enforcement and education. The beach unit’s duties are for the protection of endangered species like piping plovers and least terns, along with shore patrol. The town leases Duxbury Beach annually and it was part of Beers’ job to balance the thousands of people using the beach with protecting an ever growing population of endangered shore birds there.

The best thing about his job? “Diversity,” he said. “On any given day, I’d be doing anything – putting boats in the water, painting floats, putting in buoys, attending meetings. The best part of my job was being a field officer. I’d get to work at 6 a.m. and work ‘till 4 p.m. and I don’t think I’d look at a clock all day. Every day went flying by.”

One of Beers’ favorite phrases when talking about his position sums up his philosophy about how he wanted to perform his duties. He has said repeatedly that it was his job to “provide safe and appropriate access” to the bay and the beach.

Even though he was in the position of harbormaster for 38 years, he said he never felt he was at a job.

"I loved it," he said. "I probably worked ten days out of those 38 years, work meaning hurricane, rescues, going to court, but the rest of the time it was a ball. It was more of an adventure than a job."

Beers has been planning his retirement for the last five years, saying "It's a younger man's job." He realized that certain aspects of the job, such as rescues, had started to become difficult for him so he began putting all the pieces in place so that the town would have a smooth transition. Town officials have taken action to fill Beers' position temporarily. On Tuesday, Town Manager René Read appointed Executive Officer Jake Emerson as acting Harbormaster. Mike Pforr, who is the Operations Officer/Endangered Species Officer, will now be the acting Executive Officer and Morgan Billings, who was the Deputy Endangered Species Officer, will fill in as the acting Operations Officer/ Endangered Species Officer. This rank will stay until Read replaces Beers. Read said he plans to post the harbormaster's job internally for seven days to see if there are any interested candidates. He said he thinks he know of at least two. He is not planning to search for a new harbormaster outside of Duxbury, he said.

"The Town and department has been preparing for my retirement and the transition of my duties and responsibilities for five years so that the function and operation of the department will continue smoothly after my departure," stated Beers in his announcement. "The department is ready and the town has very experienced, prepared and trained staff in place. I leave with the department in very capable hands."

In reflecting upon Beer's tenure Duxbury Board of Selectmen had high praise for the man whose ubiquitous presence on the town's waterways will be missed by many.

Read remembers working with him 15 years ago when he was employed in Harwich. He sought Beers' help when he had to rewrite that town's harbor management plan and he knew that Duxbury had a progressive harbor management plan.

"He helped me immensely in that position," Read said. When he came to Duxbury, Beers was there again sharing his knowledge of the bay and even helping Read when he bought a boat. "For me, he was a great mentor in helping me understand how this waterfront worked" Read said. "When I bought my boat he was extremely helpful. He even helped me launch it. " Selectman Ted Flynn learned a lot from Beers when the harbor was recently dredged. Newly retired, Flynn spent a lot of his free time on the waterfront.

"I was fascinated with it (the dredging) and spent a lot of time with Don down there just seeing the progress," Flynn said. "He was explaining how the whole system was working, what they were doing... He's just a fantastically knowledgeable guy and I liked hanging around down there with him."

Selectmen Chairman David Madigan was impressed with the way Beers handled himself officially especially in front of selectmen when called to make a presentation.

"I just thought he was a fantastic representative for the town and the harbormaster's service was tremendous," said Madigan. "Every time he came in to make a presentation he sat there very stoically without a lot to say and you know when he finally got up to say something it was probably going to put the issue to settle."

Flynn added: "When he came in here he'd give you the full package. He was always well prepared and his presentations were excellent."

Selectman Shawn Dahlen has known Beers for three decades and he, too, gained a lot of local knowledge about Duxbury bay and beach from Beers.

"I've probably known Don for thirty years," said Dahlen. "I consider him one of the most dedicated town employees I've ever seen. I distinctly remember back decades ago, this is when Tom Groux was manager and I was chairman of the conservation commission at the time, myself, Al Kramer and Donny first rode in Donny's truck after the "No Name" storm and entered Gurnet Road. I said 'Donny, we can make it through there,' and we ended up getting stuck and had to get pulled out by a fire engine."

"He was an incredible wealth of knowledge," Dahlen continued. "I hung around with him, drove around town and learned so many things. A lot of what I know today in terms of the environment, the beach, that was all gleaned from Don over years and years." To Dahlen Beers was always on the job.

"His dedication was really reflected in that he was the person who would always work 60-plus hours a week even though he was getting paid for 40 hours a week," he said. "At one point in time I went to Tom Groux and said 'you realize that Donny is using his personal vehicle, his Jeep to go and do patrols at the beach and he doesn't have a town vehicle' because that's how dedicated he was. Whatever was had to be done, he was going to do it. He was beating his own vehicle to death doing his job for the benefit of the town. That's just the way he is. He would work seven days a week.

"He always considered the safety of the residents and the shell fishermen on the bay his top priority," said Dahlen.

On his first day of retirement Tuesday, Beers was enjoying the fine weather and he mowed his lawn. He plans to do some police details but mostly he hopes to take time to relax, enjoying the last few weeks of summer, something he could never do when on or off the clock because he'd always be worrying about the safety of people on the bay.

"Hopefully, I'll be able to stop worrying on beautiful days now," he said.

The town will honor Beers at a retirement party at the senior center on Thursday, October 20 from 5-7:30 p.m.



Photo courtesy Duxbury police